CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

CD/PV.835
2 September 1999

ENGLISH

FINAL RECORD OF THE EIGHT HUNDRED AND THIRTY-FIFTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 2 September 1999, at 10.20 a.m.

President: Mr. Leslie Luck (Australia)

GE.99-65780 (E)

The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 835th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament, and may I, at the outset, extend a very warm welcome, on behalf of all of us, to two new colleagues who have joined us for the first time today, Ambassador Westdal of Canada and Ambassador Sanders of the Netherlands, who are very welcome among our fraternity here, and let us assure them of our full cooperation and support in the discharge of their functions. I am also pleased to welcome the participants in the United Nations Disarmament Fellowship and Training Programme who are observing the proceedings of the plenary this morning. I hope they will benefit from exposure to our forum, and especially from the presentations that will be made to them on various aspects of our work. I wish them a very fruitful stay in Geneva.

I have on my list of speakers for today the representatives of Slovakia and China. Before giving them the floor, I should like to remind you that immediately following this plenary meeting we shall hold an informal plenary meeting to continue consideration of our draft annual report, as contained in document CD/WP.503.

With those few remarks, I should now like to give the floor to the representative of Slovakia, Ambassador Kálmán Petócz.

Mr. PETÓCZ (Slovakia): Mr. President, at the outset I would like to extend to you, on behalf of the Slovak delegation, our sincere congratulations on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. I would also wish to express words of appreciation to your five predecessors for their untiring work. It is a great honour for me to address this Conference with a general statement for the first time since my appointment to the ambassadorial post. Allow me to assure you of my delegation's fullest support of your endeavour to advance the work of this negotiating forum. I would also like to take this opportunity to extend our best regards to Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, Secretary-General of the CD, and to his deputy, Mr. Abdelkader Bensmail, as well as to the other members of the secretariat, and to convey our appreciation for their valuable contribution to our work. It gives me great pleasure to welcome the newly admitted member States - Ireland, Ecuador, Tunisia, Malaysia and Kazakhstan - and I look forward to working with them to achieve the common goals of this Conference. Last but not least, I should like to greet our newly arrived colleagues, Ambassador Westdal of Canada and Ambassador Sanders of the Netherlands, wishing them a successful and rewarding mission here in Geneva.

When I arrived in Geneva in spring this year, I made just a short introductory statement in the CD with the intention of delivering a general statement after the Conference commenced its substantial work. However, since under this schedule you might never again hear me speaking in the plenary, I decided to take the floor today in spite of the fact that we have not commenced the work. My paper has four pages, which means, in light of Ambassador Majoor's rule, that I expect to be here with you for four years. I am absolutely sure that we can approve a programme of work well before the end of my term, and with this firm belief in mind, I deliver this speech.

(Mr. Petócz, Slovakia)

I would like to offer a review of our basic positions with regard to the main issues of disarmament, the work of the Conference itself, as well as to highlight some of my country's achievements in the field of disarmament in the recent past.

It is indeed unsatisfactory that the CD has lost another year which could have been used far more progressively. In January it seemed logical to us that the Conference resume its negotiations where it left off last year. Therefore we supported the proposal (CD/1566) of the then CD President, Ambassador Grey, with which we associated the prospect of commanding a general consensus. This, unfortunately, did not happen. As the Conference continued to discuss the programme of work for this year's session, we noted a certain number of other proposals or initiatives made by the Presidents, regional groups, groups of States and even single delegations. Some of these attempted to formulate a comprehensive programme of work, while others sought either to adopt only a limited programme of work or to concentrate on particular parts of the agenda. I would like to place on record that our priority was - and still is - to have a comprehensive programme of work, although we have been ready to support, as the last resort, the idea of having a limited one. My delegation's strong belief that goodwill, a constructive approach and the necessary amount of flexibility are the essence of any progress has led us to expressly support - or at least not to object to - the majority of those efforts. It is our view that further elaboration on the so-called "Ambassador Dembri's package", which has brought this body closer to a consensus than ever before, will enable us to overcome this unfavourable situation. We deem it appropriate to effectively use the rest of this year's session, as well as the upcoming inter-sessional period, for consultations with a view to narrowing down the remaining differences and reaching the long-sought consensus. This should enable us to start substantive negotiations next year without any unnecessary delay.

The promotion of international peace and security is closely tied to the implementation of global instruments that aim to halt the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and strive for their eventual elimination. Indeed, the Sixth Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, to be held next year in New York, and the Conference on Facilitating the Entry into Force of the CTBT, to be held this autumn in Vienna, are the most important events in this sphere organized under the aegis of the United Nations. Aiming at the universalization of the nuclear non-proliferation regime and further progress in nuclear disarmament, the conferences are supposed to bring a new impetus to these endeavours.

Slovakia, as a country using nuclear energy solely for peaceful purposes, was among the first who signed and ratified the CTBT as one of the 44 States listed in annex II to the Treaty. We have been actively involved in the work of the Preparatory Commission for the CTBTO, as well as in the preparation of the forthcoming Vienna Conference. The implementation of the integrated safeguard system of the International Atomic Energy Agency constitutes in our view a crucial element in strengthening the non-proliferation regime and would make a beneficial contribution to the 2000 NPT Conference. My Government is now in the course of adapting the national legislation in order to meet the requirements of the aforementioned new safeguards measures.

(Mr. Petócz, Slovakia)

Besides the NPT and the CTBT, I would like to dwell upon another substantial issue: the fissile material cut-off treaty. As identified and then confirmed by various multilateral forums, including the United Nations General Assembly and the 1995 Review and Extension Conference of the States Parties to the NPT, the FMCT remains the next challenge in the field of nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament. Quite naturally, it occupies the top of my delegation's priorities. We expect that the future treaty should address both these aspects. We welcomed last year's decision of the CD, based on the 1995 Shannon report, to establish an ad hoc committee under agenda item 1 to negotiate a non-discriminatory, multilateral and internationally and effectively verifiable treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. Unfortunately, little chance was given to this subsidiary body and during its two meetings the CD could hardly reach any tangible result. Although the FMCT deliberations continued in the CD plenary format, they could not substitute for substantive negotiations in the ad hoc committee setting. Despite the revealed conceptual differences and differing positions of the CD delegations, the imperative of an immediate resumption of substantive negotiations still persists. The key attributes of the future treaty are contained in the ad hoc committee's very mandate and my delegation associates itself with them unreservedly. Viewed realistically, the FMCT should ban future fissile material production for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. Furthermore, it should limit the fissile material stockpiles available for use in nuclear weapons irreversibly. This must be accompanied by a vital verification system. The vast experience and repository of expertise of IAEA make it the most appropriate body for this purpose.

The dynamics of the Ottawa process on the international ban of landmines have exceeded even the most optimistic expectations. The whole procedure - from its inception in 1996, to the text elaboration and signature by the majority of the international community in 1997, to the exceptional growth in the number of ratification instruments in 1998, and the Convention's final entry into force in March 1999 - was carried out with tremendous speed, which ranks it among the most illustrious achievements in the history of disarmament efforts. I am proud to announce that on 25 February 1999, Slovakia ratified the Ottawa Convention. In accordance with article 17 of this Convention, it entered into force for my country on 1 August 1999.

In joining the international fight against these abhorrent and inhuman weapons from the very beginning, Slovakia has stressed its determination to achieve the ultimate goal of their total and eventual elimination. This provides me with the opportunity to encourage hesitant States to do likewise. My country has embarked on the path of promoting the universalization of the Convention. It is a great honour for us to serve as rapporteur of the Standing Committee of Experts on Stockpile Destruction, one of the five committees which bear the responsibility of inter-sessional work between the First and Second Meetings of the States Parties to the Ottawa Convention in Maputo and Geneva respectively. Along with our firm and unabating commitment to the Ottawa process, we believe that the commencement of negotiations in the CD on a ban of APL transfers would be a very positive step in the right direction. We would see those two processes as complementary rather than competitive.

(Mr. Petócz, Slovakia)

I would like to reiterate Slovakia's offer to provide our expertise, environment-friendly technology and capacities for the destruction of APL stockpiles to interested countries which do not possess such means. Our aim is to contribute to the growth in the number of signatories and States parties to the Ottawa Convention by extending a helping hand to overcome the problems that may prevent States from joining. Furthermore, we have developed very effective mine clearance devices, whose capabilities and safe operation have won extraordinary appraisal by experts, especially in the territory of former Yugoslavia. We are ready to provide our expertise in demining, training capabilities and resources for landmine victim rehabilitation and assistance to States and institutions within and perhaps even beyond our region. We look forward to entering into a dialogue with our prospective partners to find ways of making use of our resources for the benefit of people and regions affected by landmines.

With regard to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects, and its Protocols, I am pleased to state that our Parliament is scheduled to approve amended Protocol II and Protocol IV in the coming days.

On 5 August 1999 we welcomed with satisfaction the enlargement of the Conference on Disarmament by five new member States. Some of them had waited to become fully-fledged members for years. We endorsed this limited decision, although our basic position on the question of CD expansion is to enable full membership to all States who declare their interest in participating in the work of this forum. I would like to use this opportunity to pay tribute to Ambassador Hofer of Switzerland on the determined work which he has undertaken as Special Coordinator on this issue. In our view this subject still has not been fully exhausted. Since the CD rules of procedure stipulate that the membership of the Conference will be reviewed at regular intervals, my delegation is convinced that the CD should remain actively seized of the matter. It seems quite appropriate to strengthen the ways in which this rule can materialize in practice. We will therefore support the reappointment of a Special Coordinator on CD expansion.

To conclude, let me reaffirm the significance my country attaches to the work of the Conference on Disarmament and the continued constructive support that this forum enjoys from my delegation.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Slovakia for his statement and for the kind words that he has addressed to the Chair. I should now like to give the floor to the representative of China, the distinguished Ambassador Li.

Mr. LI (China) (translated from Chinese): Mr. President, the Chinese delegation congratulates you on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and expresses appreciation for your endeavours in seeking consensus on the programme of work and your efforts in drafting the annual report of the Conference. I take this opportunity to express my welcome to Ambassador Sanders of the Netherlands and the Ambassador of Canada,

(Mr. Li, China)

newly arrived in the CD. I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome the staff of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research attending our proceedings today.

Mr. President, the 1999 session of the CD is about to be concluded. During this session, your predecessors and you yourself have made earnest and unremitting efforts to complete the programme of work for the year and made proposals to that end; so have a number of delegations. However, due to difficulties in bridging the differences among delegations on two important agenda items, namely, nuclear disarmament and prevention of an arms race in outer space, the programme of work is still not in our reach. The Chinese delegation has found this situation rather disappointing.

The Chinese delegation believes the regrettable situation in the CD this year is mainly attributable to two factors. First, the work of the Conference, a multilateral disarmament negotiating body, is closely related to, and directly affected by, the overall international peace and security situation. A series of developments this year in the field of international peace and security have deeply affected international relations and States' confidence and security perceptions, which in turn have inevitably affected the entire international disarmament process, not excluding the Conference on Disarmament. Secondly, the divergence among member States on the CD's programme of work is not simply procedural but reflects differences over priorities for the international disarmament agenda. The CD's programme of work should take this fully into consideration and accommodate the concerns of all member States to the largest extent possible, in a comprehensive and balanced manner. A display of political will and flexibility is required from all sides. Clearly, further efforts in this regard are needed.

That people feel upset about the current situation of the Conference is understandable. However, it is not appropriate to call into question the role and credibility of the Conference, or to go so far as to propose its suspension. The Chinese delegation believes that the Conference on Disarmament, the only multilateral disarmament negotiating body, is of irreplaceable status and role. Even if it has not been able to get down to treaty negotiations for the time being, it is still an important forum for exchanges on major issues of international peace and security and on some specific disarmament items. It can help enhance mutual understanding and explore the possibilities for negotiations on certain issues. It is our hope that the international situation will improve and delegations can accommodate each other's concerns in a practical and flexible manner in order to reach early agreement on a comprehensive and balanced programme of work next year. In that case, the situation of the Conference could take a favourable turn.

The current session made major progress when the Conference formally expanded and admitted five new members, namely, Ecuador, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Malaysia and Tunisia, on 5 August. My delegation once again welcomes them warmly and hopes to cooperate with them closely. The admission of new members enables the Conference to enjoy wider representation. China has always had a positive attitude towards appropriate expansion of the Conference. We take note of the positions expressed by delegations on further expansion. In this

(Mr. Li, China)

regard, we believe that factors of political balance, the optimum size of the Conference as a negotiating body, and efficiency should be taken into consideration.

At the plenary of 19 August distinguished Ambassador Munir Akram of Pakistan made a statement on the draft Indian nuclear doctrine released by the Indian National Security Advisory Committee. The statement received wide attention. As a close neighbour of South Asia, China genuinely hopes for peace, security and stability in the region, with the tensions easing and the nuclear arms race being brought to an end. In a statement in that connection, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman reiterated that United Nations Security Council resolution 1172 on South Asian nuclear tests should be implemented as soon as possible in a comprehensive and serious manner.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the distinguished Ambassador of China for his statement and for the kind words that he has addressed to the Chair.

That concludes my list of speakers for the day. Is there any other delegation that wishes to take the floor? I see none.

Before bringing this morning's proceedings to a close, I feel I should say a few words about the situation with the work programme and the intensive consultations I have been conducting in the period since I assumed the presidency. It is now clearly only a few days before the end of our session in 1999, and it therefore seems clear that notwithstanding some indications that important delegations have fresh instructions and new flexibility, we no longer have any time to complete negotiations on a work programme. This is indeed, I think, unfortunate, and the concern among delegations that we should have made progress in reaching agreement on a work programme and should have reached a consensus on one has been reflected in a number of statements that have been made before this plenary. Nonetheless, I believe this situation needs to be reflected in an appropriate manner in our annual report.

The preparations of the annual report have been making progress through informal consultations and informal discussions over the past week, and there is still some further work to do which we will pursue later in the day. I have found in the consultations that I have been conducting widely among delegations of the Conference and among the groups constituting the Conference that increasingly delegates wish to turn their minds to how we properly describe the results of our work in the annual report, and specifically how we deal with the conclusion that it has not been possible to reach agreement on a programme of work.

I must say that I have greatly appreciated the accessibility and the patience and the wise counsel of all my colleagues in the Conference in the recent days as we have had to intensify our work. As you will be aware, it has been my view that there is a very broad sentiment within the Conference that, notwithstanding our inability to reach consensus on a programme of work, we should somehow find a way to continue our efforts in that regard and to try and reach convergence on outstanding issues and narrow gaps.

(The President)

In response to that sentiment, I have felt compelled to take some initiatives of my own as President, but initiatives which as best as I can have been designed to fully reflect the collective views of the Conference, and it is my hope that we will be able to focus on those ideas and move expeditiously in the next period, in the next day or so, to conclude our work on the annual report and resolve a constructive and forward-looking component to that report.

As delegations will be aware, it is our intention to return to that work shortly after the conclusion of this plenary when, after a short break of 10 minutes, we will reconvene in informal plenary session.

With those few words and in the absence of any other delegation wishing to take the floor, I would declare this morning's meeting closed with the reminder that we will meet again in plenary session on Tuesday, 7 September 1999, at 10 a.m., at which I intend hopefully to conclude the 1999 session of the Conference.

The meeting rose at 10.45 a.m.